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GUEST EDITORIAL

CIA's Blank Check for Slander

(The Dayton Daily News)

The best thing that can be said of Judge Roszel C. Thomsen's ruling in Baltimore's CIA slander case is that it probably will be appealed. If allowed to stand, the decision by the federal court judge would permit the Central Intelligence agency to slander and libel freely without having to answer for or justify its acts.

The judge ruled that Juri Raus, whom the CIA acknowledges as its own man, needn't testify in the \$200,000 damage suit filed against him by Eerick Heine. The CIA told the court Raus was acting under orders when he called Heine an agent of the Soviet secret police during a New York meeting of the Legion of Estonian Liberation.

Judge Thomsen said that for Raus to testify might breach his oath of secrecy and that the CIA has a right to protect its foreign intelligence sources in the United States.

Maybe, but only up to a point. Wouldn't

the ruling, for instance, allow the CIA to tamper with U. S. elections by assigning agents to slander candidates the agency didn't like? There is no indication of course, that the CIA plans any such sport, but clearly the opportunity must be hedged against, if not to protect Americans from any conscious plotting, then to shield them from zealotry no matter how high-minded the zeal might be.

If higher courts find, as Judge Thomsen has, that Congress granted the CIA power to protect its activities from all judicial inquiry — and denied redress to all CIA victims — then Congress will have to amend the law.

Meantime, shouldn't Congress be looking into another angle of the case? The 1946 law that created the CIA specifically barred the agency from internal security functions. Isn't there cause to wonder whether, by ordering slander at a meeting in New York, the CIA was operating where it has no business?

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